

Looking For a Place To Live

I should have known today would be like yesterday, yesterday when a mad old lady turned down our offer to convert her rummage-sale duplex into a palace. So when Mr. Manners shows up in his pants with the enormous, sagging crotch and his neon Masonic tie-tack, I begin to get wary. Then I see he has the shakes, and since a man who drinks can't be all bad I loosen up. Wrong again.

"What line you in, son?" he asks.

"I'm a teacher," I reply, a statement which moves him to shake my hand for the fifth time.

"God bless you," he says.

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"People right up ahead of you are swell kids," he says. "My wife and I just love 'em, love 'em. Tom's wife had uremic poisoning once." I am still smiling, but should I smile at uremic poisoning? I frown and walk into the bathroom. He follows me in and sits on the john.

"New johnny seat," he says. "Try it."

Good Lord. He follows me out and points to the back of the house.

"Little lady back there's a jewel. Cute as a button." I look out the window and the object of our conversation leans out the back door and spits into the lawn. She does not even faintly resemble a button. My wife asks if the neighborhood is quiet. We receive an odd answer.

"Not a Negro," he says. "Not a Negro for blocks. I was on a train once with 50 Negroes and they all had colds."

Something snaps in my head.

"Listen," I say. "I kind of like Negroes. In fact, my Mother was a Negro."

He steps back, horror written all over his face. He grabs for his Shriner pin and holds it out in front of him like the Good Doctor repelling Count Dracula.

"You're a macaroon," he screams.

"Octoroon," I answer. Besides, sir, I didn't tell you about our pets. We've got a weasel and a octopus and once a year the phoenix resurrects itself in our front room. Well you know what that does to our chances for a good policy, eh?"

"Get out," he shouts. Then he looks at my mustache and adds, "You Bolshevik transvestite."

In the car I tell my wife that his last line was a good one. She just says how she loves me. What a good girl she is.